

5 Ways to Leverage
Speaking + Listening
to BUILD BETTER WRITERS

with Laura Kebart, M.Ed.
& Perfection Learning





5 Strategies:

- ① Character Debate Club
- ② Say It, Then Write It
- ③ Podcasting Pre-writes
- ④ Peer Interviews
- ⑤ 3 x 3

BONUS

Complements & Counterclaims

What the Research Says:

Reading and writing float on a sea of talk. Oral language development facilitates print literacy; speaking and listening are essential for comprehension and writing.

Reading Rockets

Source: <https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/comprehension/articles/speaking-and-listening-contentarea-learning>



**Drop your grade
level in the chat:**

*What grade(s) are you
teaching this year?*

STRATEGY # ①

Character Debate Club

Turn your classroom into a mini courtroom or debate hall. Assign students character roles from your current novel or short story, and ask them to defend decisions, motives, or actions.

STRATEGY # 1

Character Debate Club

Turn your classroom into a mini courtroom or debate hall. Assign students character roles from your current novel or short story, and ask them to defend decisions, motives, or actions.

The Giver

Should Jonas have shared the memories sooner?

Esperanza Rising

Was Esperanza right to trust Miguel?

Bud, Not Buddy

Did Bud make the right choice to run away?

STRATEGY # 1

Character Debate Club

Why it works:

Oral debate = rehearsal for claims and evidence.

Students hear multiple sentence frames and ideas before writing.

Bonus: Builds empathy and teaches respectful disagreement.

STRATEGY #1

Character Debate Club

1. So far, would you consider the character's biggest decision brave or reckless?	2. Is this character acting out of selfishness or selflessness?
3. Should this character be forgiven for their choices at this point? Why or why not?	4. Is the character handling the main conflict fairly or unfairly?
5. Are you seeing evidence of the character growing or staying the same?	6. As of right now, is the character motivated more by fear or by courage?
7. In what way does the setting (time + location) make the character's choices harder or easier?	8. Should the character have trusted another character more (or less)?
9. What lesson is this character probably supposed to be learning?	10. Are the character's actions satisfying or disappointing?



Character Debate Club

Any Short Story or Novel

Is the character's biggest decision brave or reckless?

Does this character act out of selfishness or selflessness?

Should this character be forgiven for their choices? Why or why not?

Would you say the conflict has been solved fairly or unfairly?

Are there signs that the character is growing or staying the same?

Does the character seem motivated more by fear or by courage?

How does the setting make the character's choices harder or easier?

Should the character have trusted another character more (or less)?

Is this character really learning the lesson the author intended?

Was the character's ending satisfying—or disappointing?

What the Research Says:

The more kids know about spoken language, the better equipped they are to succeed in reading and writing. Oral language skills form the foundation for literacy, and spoken vocabulary predicts later writing success.

Keys to Literacy

Source: <https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/oral-language-the-foundation-for-reading-and-writing/>

LISTEN

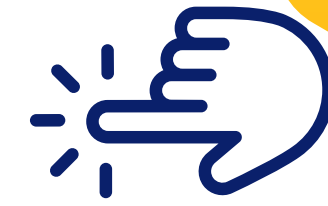
THINK

SPEAK

STRATEGY # 2



Say It, Then Write It



I have something to say.

I agree with that.

I disagree with that.

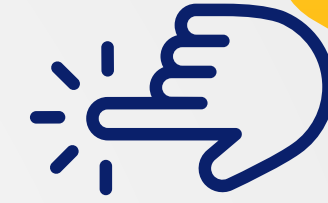
I have an idea.

I thought of something.

STRATEGY # 2



Say It, Then Write It

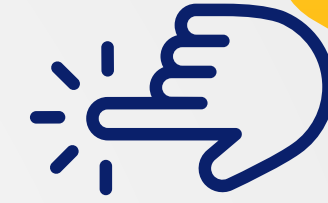


Give students sentence starters (like training wheels for their writing).

STRATEGY # 2



Say It, Then Write It



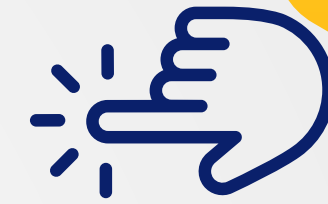
Give students sentence starters (like training wheels for their writing).

First, they practice saying a full sentence out loud to a partner.

STRATEGY # 2



Say It, Then Write It



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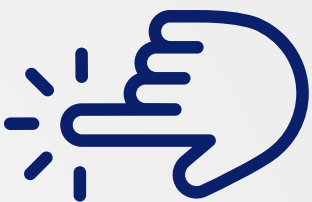
First, they practice saying a full sentence out loud to a partner.

Then they immediately write that same sentence.

STRATEGY # 2



Say It, Then Write It



1. One reason ___ is important is...	2. The author's main idea is ___, which is shown by...
3. Some people believe ___, but I think...	4. This detail matters because it shows...
5. The evidence proves ___ because...	6. A symbol/example of ___ is ___ because...
7. If I had been ___, I would have...	8. In my opinion, the most convincing point is...
9. A counterpoint someone might make is ___ but...	10. This connects to real life because...



Say It, Then Write It

Fiction & Nonfiction Stems

One reason ___ is important is...

The author's main idea is ___, which is shown...

Some people believe ___, but I think...

This detail matters because it shows...

The evidence proves ___ because...

A symbol/example of ___ is ___ because...

If I had been ___, I would have...

In my opinion, the most convincing point is...

A counterpoint someone might make is ___, but...

This connects to real life because...

What the Research Says:

Verbal rehearsal helps students draft stronger first sentences and paragraphs. Scaffolded opportunities for oral rehearsal improve sentence structure and cohesion before writing.

Writers Who Care (2024)

Source: <https://writerswhocare.wordpress.com/2024/10/02/using-verbal-rehearsal-with-students-a-wayto-support-stronger-first-drafts/>

LISTEN

THINK

SPEAK

STRATEGY # ③

Podcasting Pre-writes



Middle schoolers love to talk,
so let's leverage that!

STRATEGY # 3

Podcasting Pre-writes

**What's one text you're teaching soon
or just finished teaching?**

Drop the title in chat.

STRATEGY # ③

CHOOSE ONE:

Rant about whether the narrator can be trusted.

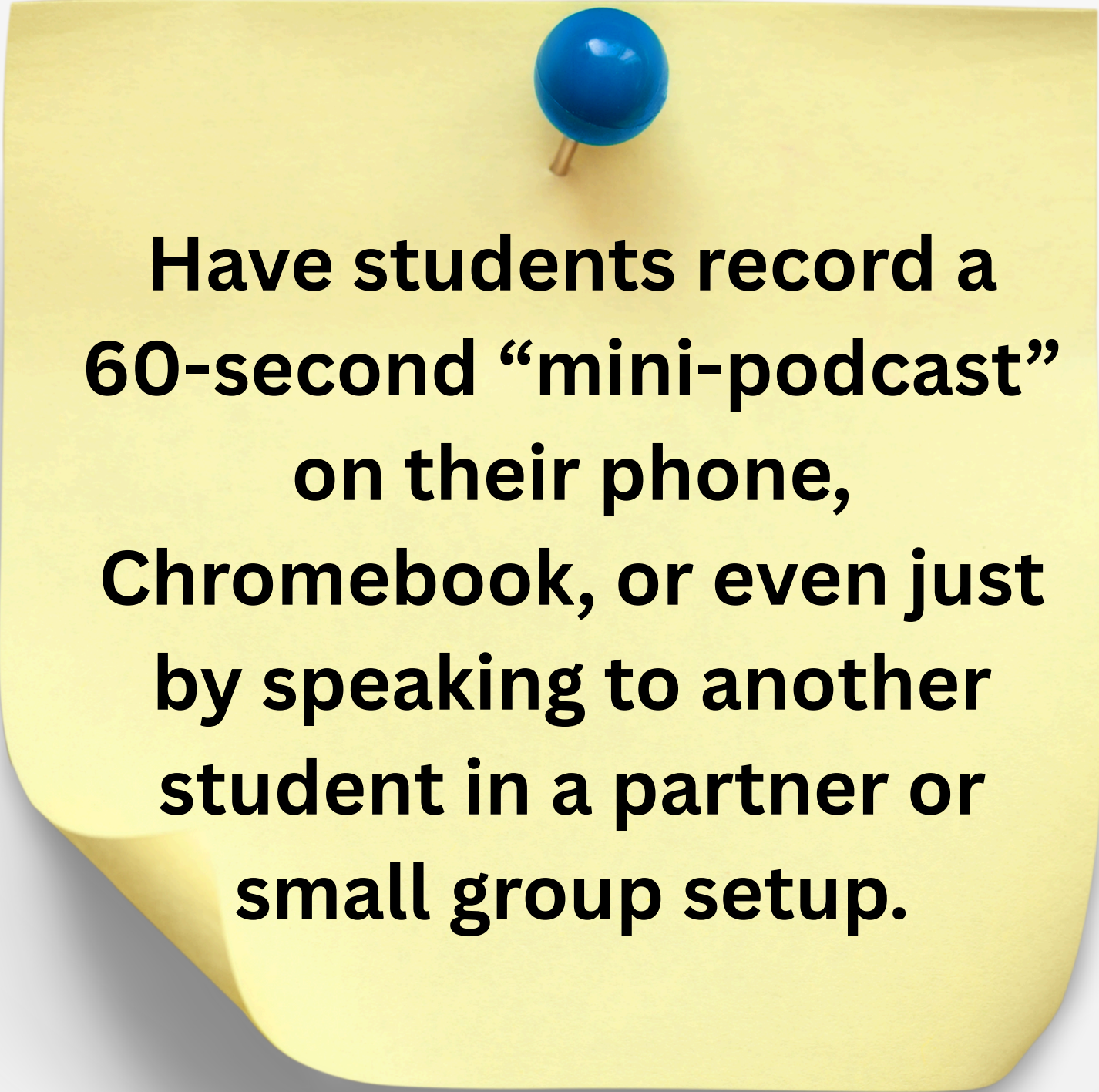
Rant about the problem you have with the author's message.

Rant about the main character's choice(s), then offer advice.

STRATEGY # ③

Podcasting Pre-writes

HOW:

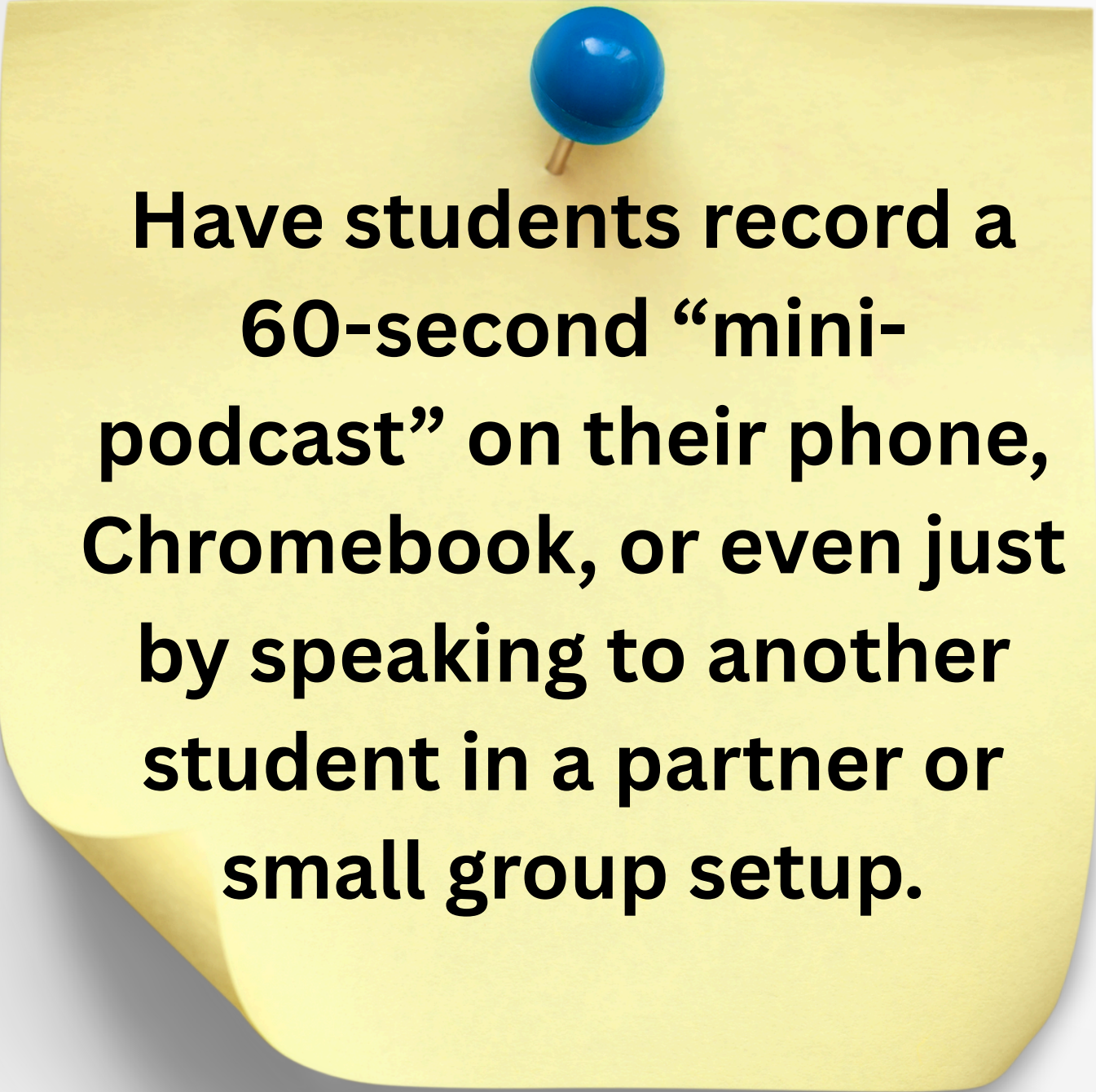


Have students record a 60-second “mini-podcast” on their phone, Chromebook, or even just by speaking to another student in a partner or small group setup.

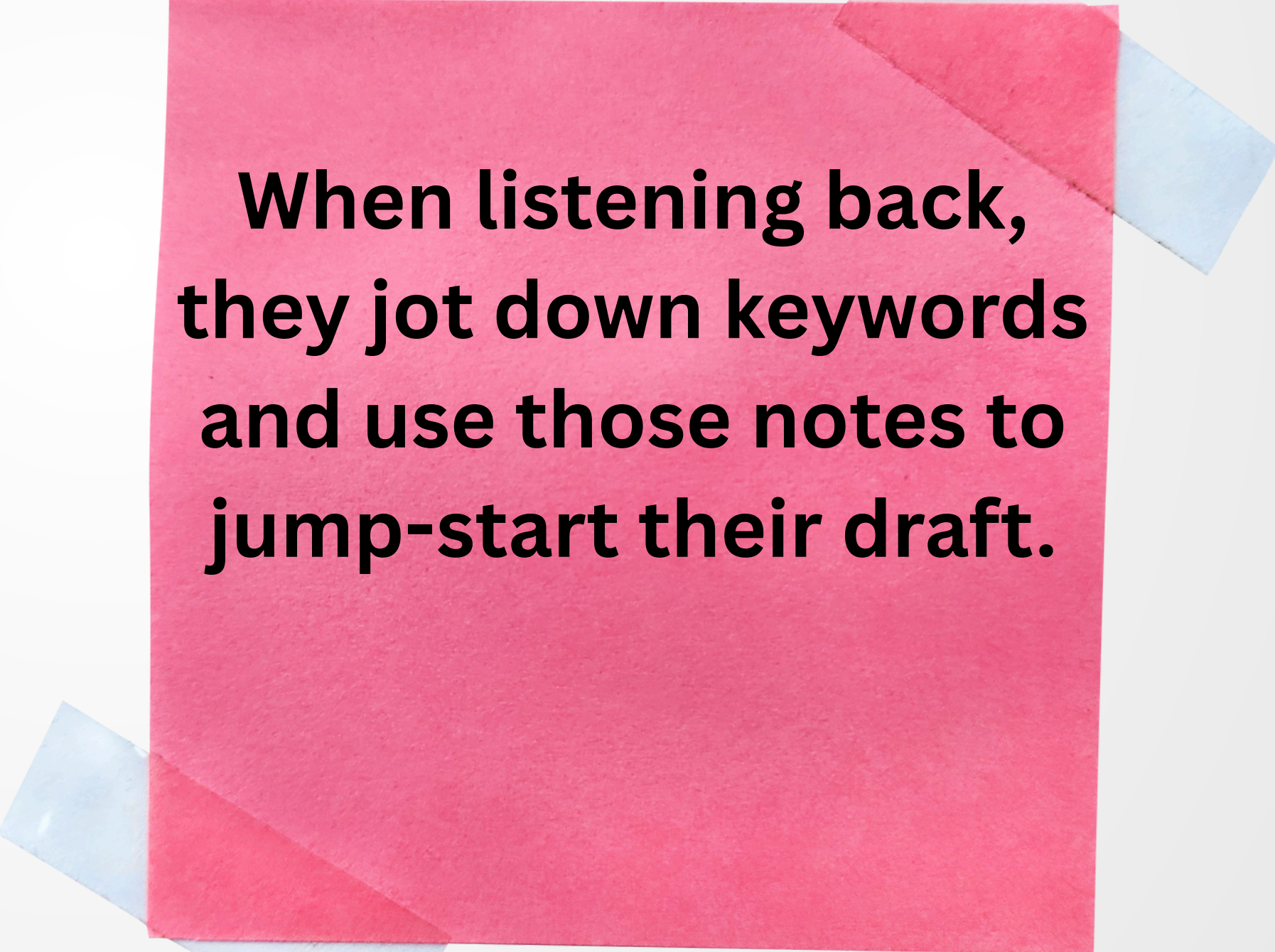
STRATEGY # 3

Podcasting Pre-writes

HOW:



Have students record a 60-second “mini-podcast” on their phone, Chromebook, or even just by speaking to another student in a partner or small group setup.



When listening back, they jot down keywords and use those notes to jump-start their draft.

STRATEGY # 3

Podcasting Pre-writes

HOW:

Have students record a 60-second “mini-podcast” on their phone, Chromebook, or even just by speaking to another student in a partner or small group setup.

When listening back from a recording device, they jot down keywords and use those notes to jump-start their draft.

If doing this with a partner or small group, then that person (or persons) will share the keywords and phrases they jotted down as the talking student spoke.

STRATEGY # ③

Podcasting Pre-writes

Why it works:

Hearing themselves speak fluently first
lowers anxiety and builds confidence.



Podcasting Pre-writes

Rants or Reflections

Rant about the most surprising part so far.

Rant about a choice the author made that you loved—or hated.

Reflect on the events, and analyze what might happen next and why.

Argue who the most important character is right now.

Rant about what you think the author's purpose is.

Talk through a scene or a quote that stood out to you.

Explain how the text connects to the current world.

Reflect on one part that confused you and why.

Reflect on how the setting impacts the story.

Give advice to the author: what would you change in the text?

STRATEGY #3

Podcasting Pre-writes

1. Explain the most surprising part so far.	2. Rant about a choice the author made that you loved—or hated.
3. Predict what might happen next and why.	4. Argue who the most important character is right now.
5. Share what you think the author's purpose is.	6. Talk through one line or quote that stood out to you.
7. Explain how something from the text connects to the real world.	8. Share one part that confused you and why. What are some different things it might mean?
9. Describe how the setting impacts the story or how it impacts a particular character.	10. Give advice to the author: what would you change?



What the Research Says:

When students talk through ideas before writing, they organize their thoughts, internalize language structures, and build confidence. Talking drafts out loud supports reluctant writers and helps them transfer oral skills into written text.

StriveTLC

Source: <https://strivetlc.com/the-importance-of-writing-how-oral-language-lays-the-foundation-for-student-success-blog-11/>

LISTEN

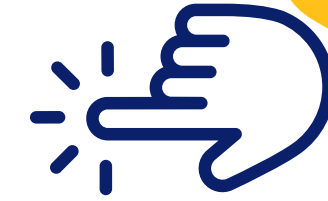
THINK

SPEAK

STRATEGY #4



Peer Interviews



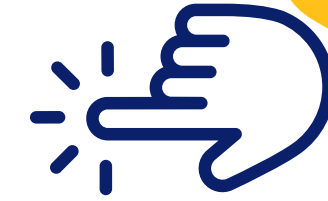
Pair students and let them interview each other before writing. This works beautifully for personal narratives, reflective writing, or even literary analysis.



STRATEGY #4



Peer Interviews



Pair students and let them interview each other before writing. This works beautifully for personal narratives, reflective writing, or even literary analysis.



Why it works:
Oral storytelling is the natural bridge to written narratives. Plus, it builds community and makes students feel heard.

STRATEGY #4

Peer Interviews

My “pro tip” is to have students do this as a bell ringer (warm-up, hook, do-now) once a week for a few weeks leading up to your impending narrative writing unit.

STRATEGY #4

Peer Interviews

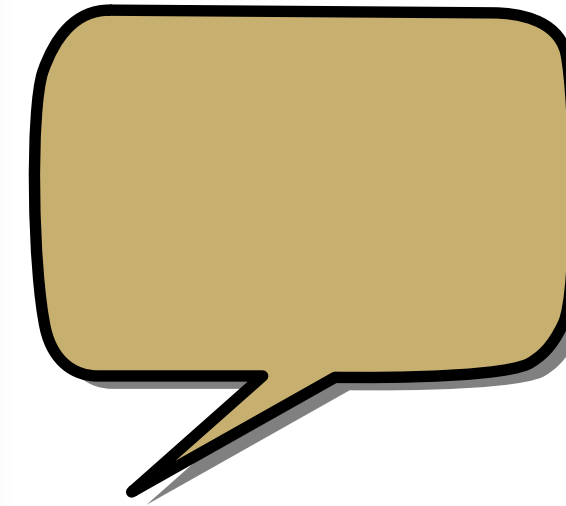
My “pro tip” is to have students do this as a bell ringer (warm-up, hook, do-now) once a week for a few weeks leading up to your impending narrative writing unit.

By the time you get into that unit, students will have a library of personal accounts to draw from so they’re not starting from scratch when it’s time to think of a narrative topic.

Peer Interviews



1. Tell me about a time you faced a tough choice.	2. What's one thing you'd never want to lose? Why?
3. Describe a moment when you felt proud of yourself.	4. Share a challenge you overcame.
5. What's a risk you've taken—did it pay off?	6. Who inspires you most, and why?
7. What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?	8. What's your dream job or goal?
9. If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?	10. Who would you trust most in a difficult situation?



Peer Interviews

(serious, funny, off-the-wall, etc)

Tell me about a time you faced a tough choice.

What's one thing you'd never want to lose? Why?

Describe a moment when you felt proud of yourself.

Share a challenge you overcame.

What's a risk you've taken—did it pay off?

Who inspires you most, and why?

What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?

What's your dream job or goal?

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

Who would you trust most in a difficult situation?



CATEGORY 1: MOMENTS THAT CHANGED YOU

A time you stood up for	The moment you	A choice that	A time you



CATEGORY 2: SCHOOL LIFE (WINS + FAILS)



CATEGORY 4: AWKWARD + EMBARRASSING

The most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you in public	A time a rule at school was broken but no one fessed up and everyone	A time a rule at school was broken but no one fessed up and everyone	A thing you tried to cook and it (really badly) failed	A haircut you thought looked good--and then changed your mind



CATEGORY 5: Unique Talents + Skills

A skill you struggled with before	The fastest you've ever learned how to do something	How you came to find a hobby that you love	A time when you got pushed out of your	A surprising thing you've gotten good at over time



CATEGORY 3: FRIENDSHIP DRAMA + SOCIAL ADVENTURES

An argument with a friend that taught you something	A time you felt like the new person and how it	The first time you talked to someone you'd met before	A time you	How to share



CATEGORY 6: RANDOM EVERYDAY LIFE STUFF

Your favorite TV show or	A weird dream you've	Your favorite midnight	The first thing you ever bought with	A time you lost something



CATEGORY 7: GROWTH, GRIT, AND "LEVEL-UP" MOMENTS

A time you kept going even when it was tough	Something you used to be terrible at but	A fear you faced head-on	A time you worked hard for something	A skill you did realize



CATEGORY 8: FOOD, FAILS, AND FUNNY BITES

A food you	A time you tried to cook or bake	A food you overindulged in and instantly regretted	Your favorite meal or dessert and the behavior	A weird food



CATEGORY 10: TECH + TRENDS

How you handle stress or pressure	The first time you ever used	Your favorite app, game, or	A time technology failed you at	A funny	A viral trend you loved (or hated)



CATEGORY 11: HOME, HOBBIES, AND HANGOUTS

Your favorite cozy spot at home	A family car story (road trip, breakdown, or funny moment)	A hobby you started and fell in love with	A collection or obsession you	A time you fixed or created	me you ghed so d you ldn't stop	Your "dream day" from start to finish



CATEGORY 12: WINS, AWARDS, AND PROUD MOMENTS

The best award or certificate you've ever	A time you worked hard for something and finally achieved	A competition, race, or performance you'll never	A moment you realized you'd improved at	A time you earned something you didn't think



CATEGORY 13: ADVENTURE + TRAVEL

Your most memorable trip or vacation	A time you lost			



CATEGORY 17: JUST FOR FUN (TOTALLY RANDOM)

A commercial or ad you can't stand	A sequel you like better than the original movie	A time you stayed up way too late for something	Th



CATEGORY 14: UH-OH + OOPS MOMENTS

A small lie that got out of control	A time you broke or damaged something important	A moment when you got caught doing something you shouldn't	A plan that completely fell apart	A time you lost something valuable



CATEGORY 15: FRIENDS + FAMILY FEELS

A person who's had a big impact on you (and why)	A friend you used to be close with but aren't anymore	The best advice a parent, grandparent, or sibling ever gave you



CATEGORY 16: LOOKING BACK + LOOKING FORWARD

A time you made a big change for yourself				



CATEGORY 18: HEARTFELT + REAL TALK

A loss or goodbye that changed you	A time you stood up for your values	A personal motto or belief that helps you when things get hard

GET INSTANT ACCESS >>

What the Research Says:

Improving oral language directly contributes to improvements in written composition. Daily structured oral-language routines (naming, describing, retelling) for just 5–10 minutes led to significant gains in vocabulary, logical sentences, and story composition over 3 months.

Neuhaus Education Center Case Study (2021)

Source: https://neuhaus.org/wp-content/uploads/Case-Study_Oral-Language-Supports-Writing-Improvement.pdf

LISTEN

THINK

SPEAK

STRATEGY #5



This one's short, sweet, and effective.

Pose a big question.

Give students three minutes to discuss with a partner, then three minutes to write.

**Repeat
~~throughout~~
~~the unit~~
as often as possible**

STRATEGY #5



Why it works:

Low-stakes, timed “bursts” normalize writing fluency and stamina.

STRATEGY # 5



1. What's the biggest conflict in the text so far?	2. How does the setting affect the mood?
3. Which character (or person) has changed the most?	4. What lesson does this text teach about life?
5. How would this story change if it were set here, today?	6. Which quote best represents the author's message?
7. What's one prediction you have for what comes next?	8. What surprised you most in this section?
9. How would you describe the author's tone?	10. What's one connection you can make between this text and your own life?



3 x 3

General Prompts

What's the biggest conflict in the text so far?

How does the setting affect the mood?

Which character (or person) has changed the most?

What lesson does this text teach about life?

How would this story change if it were set today?

Which quote best represents the author's message?

What's one prediction you have for what comes next?

What surprised you most in this section?

How would you describe the author's tone?

What's one connection you can make between this text and your own life?

LISTEN

THINK

SPEAK

BONUS

Complements & Counterclaims

[This one is perfect for a closure activity,
especially if you're running a writing workshop]



Great!



Great Job!



BONUS

Complements & Counterclaims

Why it works:

Oral feedback boosts confidence and models revision.
It also strengthens classroom culture by making peer critique
productive and supportive.



Great!



Great Job!





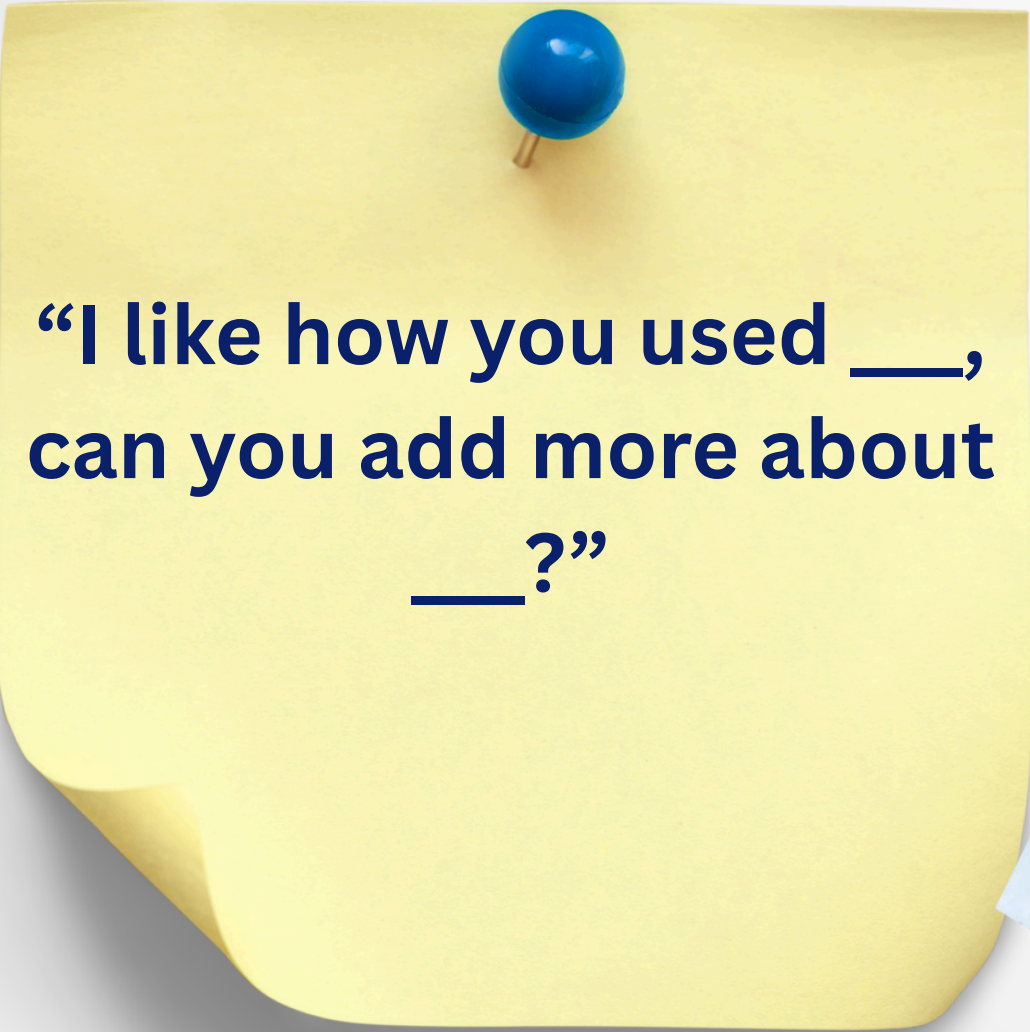
Complements & Counterclaims

End class with a mini “feedback circle.”

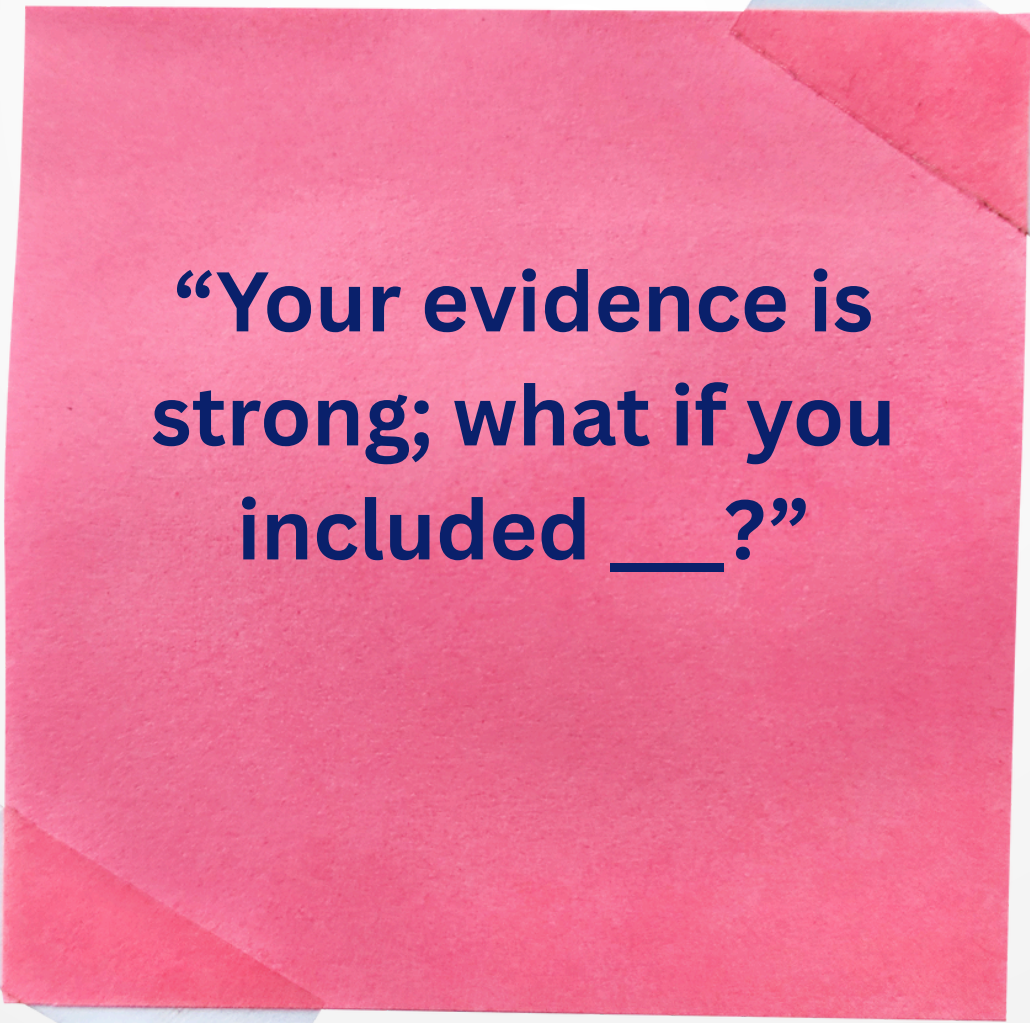
Students read one strong line aloud from their own drafts. Peers respond with sentence stems for feedback, like:



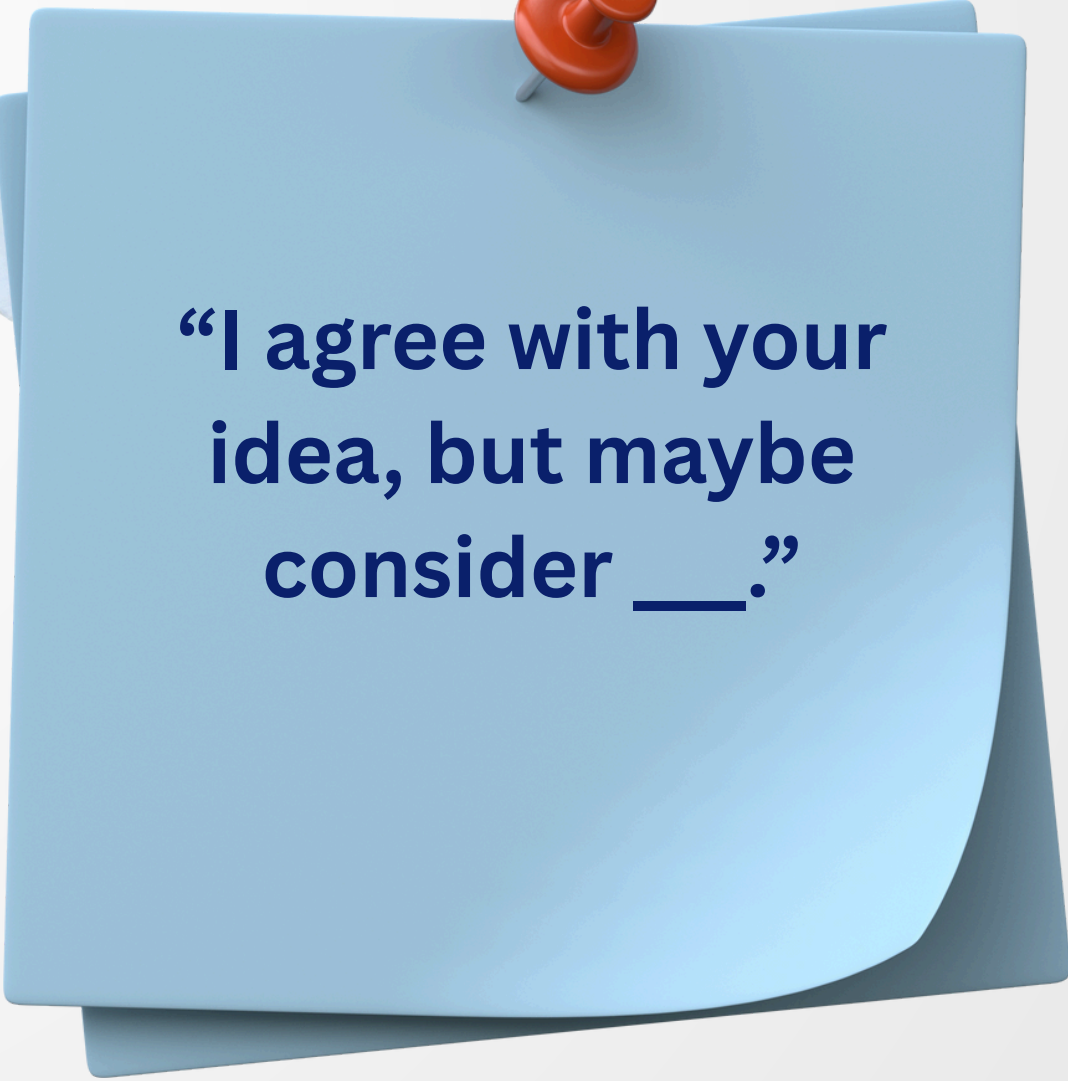
Complements & Counterclaims



“I like how you used ___,
can you add more about
___?”



“Your evidence is
strong; what if you
included ___?”



“I agree with your
idea, but maybe
consider ___.”

Complements & Counterclaims

Feedback Stems

I like how you used ___, can you add more about ___?

Your evidence is strong; what if you included ___ too?

I agree with your idea, but what about ___?

I noticed your beginning was strong—can you make your ending match that?

The tone fits well, but maybe try varying your word choice here.

I like your example; could you explain it more clearly?

I think your conclusion is solid, but could you add one more detail?

You made a good point; what's one counterpoint someone might argue?

I like how you organized your ideas; could you add a transition here?

Your writing is clear—what's one way you could make it even more persuasive?



Complements & Counterclaims

Compliments & Counterclaims

1. I like how you used _____. Can you add more about _____?	2. Your evidence is strong. What if you included _____ too?
3. I agree with your idea, but what about _____?	4. I noticed your beginning was strong—can you make your ending match that?
5. The tone fits well, but maybe try varying your word choice here.	6. I'm trying to understand your example. Could you explain it more clearly or in a different way?
7. I think this paragraph (or part) is off to a good start, but could you add one more detail?	8. You made a good point; what's one counterpoint that someone might argue?
9. I like how you organized your ideas, but could you add a transition here to help connect everything?	10. What's one way you could make this part even more persuasive?

TASK CARDS

1. So far, would you consider the character's biggest decision brave or reckless?	2. Is this character acting out of selfishness or selflessness?
3. Should this character be forgiven for their choices at this point? Why or why not?	4. Is the character handling the main conflict fairly or unfairly?
5. Are you seeing evidence of the character growing or staying the same?	6. As of right now, is the character motivated more by fear or by courage?
7. In what way does the setting (time + location) make the character's choices harder or easier?	8. Should the character have trusted another character more (or less)?
9. What lesson is this character probably supposed to be learning?	10. Are the character's actions satisfying or disappointing?

2. The author's main idea is __, which is shown by...
4. This detail matters because it shows...
6. A symbol/example of __ is __ because...
8. In my opinion, the most convincing point is...

1.		2.
Explain the most surprising part so far.		Rant about a choice the author made that you loved—or hated.
2.	open next and	
main idea is __, which is shown by...		4.
		Argue who the most important character is right now.
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matters because it shows...		6.
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ample of __ is __ because...		8.
	from the text l world.	Share one part that confused you and why. What are some different things it might mean?
8.		10.
the most convincing point is...		

2. What's one thing you'd never want to lose? Why?
4. Share a challenge you overcame.
6. Who inspires you most, and why?
8. What's your dream job or goal?

1. What's the biggest conflict in the text so far?	2. How does the setting affect the mood?
2. What's one thing you'd never want to lose? Why?	4. What lesson does this text teach about life?
4. What was a challenge you overcame.	6. Which quote best represents the author's message?
6. Who inspires you most, and why?	8. What surprised you most in this section?
8. What's your dream job or goal?	10. What's one connection you can make between this text and your own life?

2. Evidence is strong. What if you included __ too?
4. Did your beginning was strong—make your ending match that?
6. Try to understand your example. Explain it more clearly or in a different way?
8. Made a good point; what's one other point that someone might argue?
10. One way you could make this argument even more persuasive?

GET INSTANT ACCESS >>

Handy Dandy Cheat Sheet

How to Leverage Speaking & Listening to Build Better Writers ~ Middle School ELA ~

#	Why	Examples	SEL	Standards
-1- Character Debate Club	Rehearsal for claims.	So far, would you consider the character's biggest decision brave or reckless? Is this character acting out of selfishness or selflessness?	Builds empathy	CCSS: Students articulate claims about a text and support them with clear reasoning and relevant evidence during structured discussion. TEKS: Students engage in academic dialogue by making claims, providing supporting evidence, responding to peers, and refining ideas through conversation.
-2- Say It, Then Write It	Fluency & lowers anxiety.	One reason _____ is important is... Some may believe __, but I think...	Oral success first	CCSS: Students rehearse ideas orally to clarify reasoning and strengthen arguments before composing written responses. TEKS: Students develop written ideas by first expressing thoughts verbally, then organizing and elaborating on them in writing.
-3- Podcasting Prewrites	Talking faster than writing.	Rant about a choice the author made that you loved—or hated. Talk through one line or quote that stood out to you.	Builds confidence	CCSS: Students evaluate and convey their thinking about an author's choices, using spoken reflection as a prewriting tool for analysis. TEKS: Students analyze a text by expressing interpretations orally, then translating those reflections into written explanations.
-4- Peer Interviews	Storytelling to writing.	Tell me about a time you faced a tough choice. What's a risk you've taken—did it pay off?	Builds community	CCSS: Students participate in collaborative discussions by asking questions, listening actively, and building on one another's ideas. TEKS: Students engage in purposeful conversation by asking clarifying questions, sharing experiences, and developing ideas through oral storytelling.
-5- 3 x 3	Low-stakes fluency.	What's the biggest conflict in the text so far? How would this story change if it were set here, today?	Stamina & trust	CCSS: Students communicate claims and interpretations clearly and adapt their reasoning when responding to others during discussion. TEKS: Students express and refine ideas through structured speaking and writing tasks that promote clarity, elaboration, and stamina.
-BONUS- Compliments & Counterclaims	Feedback & revision.	I like how you used _____. Can you add more about ____? Your evidence is strong. What if you included _____, too?	Feedback culture	CCSS: Students evaluate peer arguments and provide constructive feedback to strengthen clarity, evidence, and reasoning. TEKS: Students give and receive specific, academically focused feedback to revise ideas, clarify meaning, and strengthen claims.

Handy Dandy Cheat Sheet

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-3- Podcasting Prewrites	Talking faster than writing.	R lo Talk through one line or quote that stood out to you.	Builds confidence	CCSS: Students evaluate and convey their thinking about an author's _____ as a prewriting tool for analysis. _____ by expressing interpretations orally, then _____ written explanations.

GET INSTANT ACCESS >>

Which One Will You Use First?



Complements & Counterclaims



Character Debates



Say It, Then Write It



Podcasting Pre-writes



Peer Interviews



3 x 3

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